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Sculptural stoneware

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SCULPTURAL STONEWARE

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My commitment to clay has been the product of visual and tactile experiences through a rather relentless involvement with this medium. The primary concern has been with creating tangible objects which will reflect intimacy and warmth. It often seems that the tragic symptom of "modernism" is to be so excessive, as a personality as well as from a purely productive evaluation of the final object, that both become somewhat repulsive. Seemingly, few artists are capable of producing creative objects possessing vitality. This is not to be so pretensive as to lay any personal claim upon a patent-like possession of beauty, whatever it is, but is ultimately an endeavor for a tangible and meaningful product.

A primary objective has been the pursuance of a lasting and endearing human communicative juncture which has been similarly used for thousands of years. The knowledge and skill indicated here is not a result of two years of academic study. Rather, it is the outcome of centuries of cooperative thought from preceding generations extending from the ancient Orient to the most contemporary of personalities within our own century. My commitment is not in novelty or "newness," nor to become submerged within meaningless repetitions of traditional techniques. It has been a search for a personal statement which has been the result of an acquisition of my values, interpreted through a somewhat premeditated conception, in an effort to synthesize technique and tradition with the mind and body to create a unified whole. Hopefully, the innate

characteristics of a material such as clay will lead eventually toward an adaptable spontaneity in process and product. I have no personal desire for an object which merely redundantly repeats tradition, or imitates and extends it, but instead, I have reinterpreted these traditional values and techniques to meet my individual needs within a time context, relevant to historical incident.

When one consciously looks at what has happened within the past decade, he realizes that within the strict confinements of this medium, all the "rules" have indeed been broken. Why must we find more "rules" to break? This seemingly is a conservative statement. It is, however, merely an attempt to look sensitively and realistically at the history of ceramics, as well as the history of other art forms. Hopefully, by attempting to be time-conscious, one may come increasingly close to a space consciousness as well. That is to say, one should learn ideally to apply positive learned responses and attitudes to his visual world and make them one, avoiding negative schisms when at all possible.

Our sensibilities to beauty, or to "good" or "bad," are administered to us for the most part by very few men of genius. Historically, nations seem to briefly pass through a period of transition from hand-made to machine-made items. Perhaps the move in the ceramic arts, particularly within the last decade, is a reaction to all such occurrences.

When seriously considering clay one must also be aware, not only of the nature of that material, but of the processes

necessary in creating a complete statement. Of all our arts, ceramics deals directly with earth, water, air, and fire, the very elements the ancients considered essential to our world. One is certainly able to slip by with a certain degree of naivety about the material. If he is serious, however, about creating a tangible object, he will find that too many misunderstandings will not lend themselves to "happy accidents," but rather to tragic ones. As he grows with the material, he will learn to create an environment through his experience which may facilitate more practically the occurrence of supposedly "happy accidents." When one considers the variables at hand and does not allow himself to be intimidated by scores of technicalities, he may find that things such as clay bodies, glaze formulae, and their action and interaction in the fire, to be so intriguing that he becomes obsessed with creating. Sadly, some become obsessed instead with meaningless technicalities which may have little bearing upon a final artistic effort.

It seems obvious to me that the authenticity of objects is not so much in question, nor are the various techniques and methods of construction, but rather the validity rests with the beholder. The vitality, awareness, character, and life-like spiritual identification communicating with the artist and observer, artist and object, and thereby the object and observer, would more logically be the determinants of how meaningful an object of art may be. To meet this triumvirate challenge, it seems the artist must learn to assimilate "art"

and "craft" until they work as one. Since the preoccupation with an end statement is of concern ideally to both craftsmen and artists, they do not seem to be at all isolated from one another--except, perhaps, within the terms themselves. Incidentally, I cannot personally understand the Western concept of one art form being "major" and another "minor," simply because an "artist" works with paint, and a "craftsman" with clay. The only distinguishable difference is medium! From our vast information centers, it perhaps takes an artist of unusual perception and strength of character to select only a few of the ideas available to him from this wealth of knowledgability. Furthermore, as Bernard Leach, in A Potter's Book, more adequately states:

> "Independence once achieved is very precious, but an exaggerated pride in its possession stands bluntly in the way of concurrence in either aim or action, and the pride is only too often merely that of an artist on a dunghill."

These attitudes are stated here in order to verbally create a communication between myself and others. It is my sincere desire that a similar communicative effort take place between my work and my observers. Whether this is in actuality the case, only time can determine entirely. The project at hand should ideally entertain most of these attitudes.

The concern with sculptural stoneware is not at all a new one. Certainly even utilitarian ware involves sculptural concepts, most evidently by those who are capable of producing good wares which embody not only principles of design but function as well. However challenging the ideas and problems which

confront me in utilitarian ware, my intention has been to explore other areas and methods within this medium to avoid obvious restrictions one is confronted with in terms of technique and product. When working with clay, it has seemed that its most obvious advantage is in the fact that as an inorganic material it can be transformed into an organic entity. Clay is plastic. It bends at the will of the artist. If his understanding of the material is clear, he will realize its limitations, either compensate for them, work around and through them, or allow these impositions to occur. If he should do the latter, he is doing so only in the context of allowing the media to speak for itself and not attempting to deny the material. Some ceramic objects could perhaps be just as effective and easier to construct with another material.

We are not dealing with a single project. Each piece in itself is a special problem confronting me with some common problems as well as those which naturally confront an artist with other obstacles intrinsic to each work. Since all of life tends to be rather musically architectural, I believe that art works should also attempt to reflect life's attitudes. The following illustrations of my work have been executed using a combination of techniques. Basic press-mould shapes, slab and coil building, and the potter's wheel have been employed.

PART II

My primary concern has been in exploring ways in which to construct a multitude of forms by combining some of the most traditional aspects of working with clay and to reinterpret them into various images employing certain basic techniques and combinations of them into a unified whole. There are only two basic press mould shapes. The primary shape is composed of two hemispherical forms. These are made by pressing a beach ball into a pair of large barrels, partially filled with plastic, and impressing the ball half way up the walls of itself. The other set of two moulds are derived from casting plaster over some sewer tile pipes. Occasionally, the pipes are used also as press moulds, particularly when the proportions of a final piece were deemed necessary to be more slenderly cylindrical. This has proven to be a practical and efficient method to construct basic forms. By combining slab, coil, and wheel-thrown forms, there has been an almost endless amount of possibilities within the strict considerations of form. There has been a conscious effort to maintain a certain restraint, in an attempt to make as intimate a statement as possible, trying to eliminate what may be sheer extraneous gimmickery or gadgetry.

The clay body used is as follows:

A.P. Green Fire Clay	100#
Kentucky Ball Clay	40#
Custer Feldspar	11#
20-mesh white silica sand or grog	15-25#
Iron, local clay or Albany Slip	3-5#

This body has proven to be quite effective. It is very

plastic, yet quite resiliant. There has been no more than a 15% shrinkage factor, which has seemed quite inconsequential. If the shrinkage were to be hazardous, the addition of some 5 to 15 parts of grog by weight to the body would certainly reduce it.

The procedures involved in constructing these forms are varied. Often merely as decorative devices, slabs, or coils of clay, or combinations of these methods are quite carefully laid or hurled firmly into the press mould forms. When substantially firm, they are joined. At times wheel thrown sections are integrated within some of the shapes. Occasionally, the objects are paddled or deliberately pushed through from within, and these areas are then filled with bulging slabs. There is an obvious explosive-implosive tension attempted. Some of the forms are designed so the observer may break certain parts away. This directly involves him with the sculptures and allows his tastes to dictate to an extent what the final piece will be according to his momentary whims. Some are break-aparts intentionally created as parodies to a mechanically-oriented world.

The following plates have all been fired to cone 10-11. They are lightly reduced at cone 08, then put into a climbing reduction from cones 5 to 9, reduced heavily from cones 10 to 11, and finally oxidized for only a few minutes to assure that the glazes would lay down. They have been fired within about an eleven, at most a twelve, hour firing schedule, allowed to cool with the dampers left slightly open, and then twelve to

fourteen hours later were unloaded.

Many of the colors in the decoration have been produced through the use of raw oxides, such as iron or rutile, used generally as understains. Engobes have been occasionally used. Glazes have been applied by dipping, pouring, and spraying. These have usually been of feldspathic origin, being either shop glazes or personal formulas. Some of the decorative elements have been accomplished by applique, or, by sprigging with some carved relief pine paddles which were made by myself. Incising, slip-trailing, sgraffito, and mishima have been permitted with a much more practiced restraint. A low fire cone 06 glaze has been rarely applied. In their characteristically bright glossy surfaces they can detract one's attention from the form. Ideally, a glaze is applied for enhancement of a form, not as a salvation for an essentially weak piece.

A personal appraisal of the successes or shortcomings of these works must rest mainly upon the technical facets at hand. It is my personal contention that any real aesthetic evaluations must be considered from a primarily time-conscious basis. Only then can they most objectively be spatially considered.

PART III

PLATE 1

PLATE 2

PLATE 3

PLATE 4

PLATE 5

PLATE 6

PLATE 7

PLATE 8

PLATE 9

PLATE 10

PLATE 11

PLATE 12

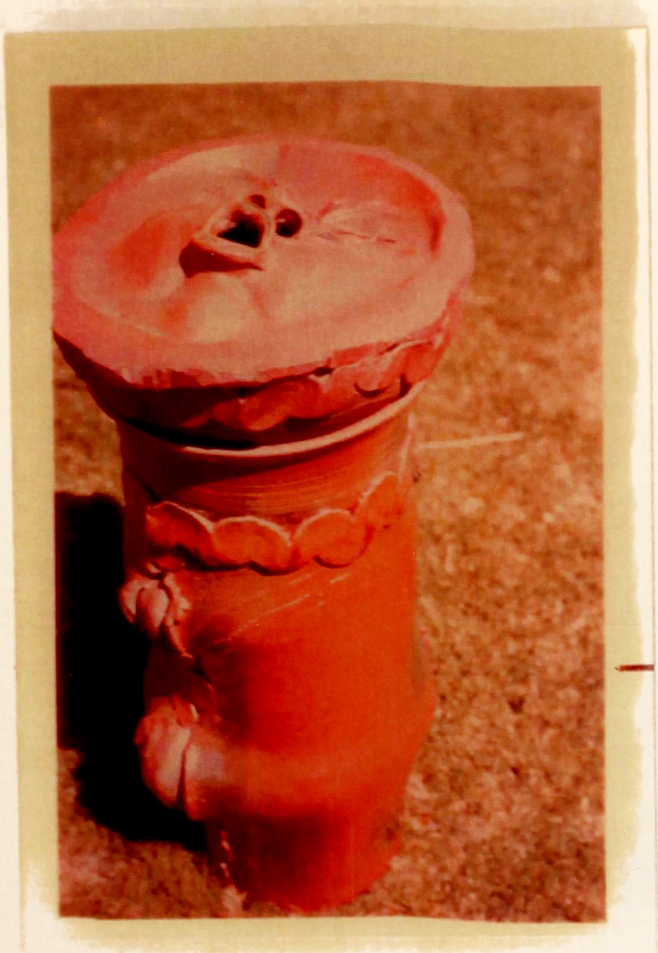

PLATE 13

PLATE 14

PLATE 15

PLATE 16

PLATE 17

PLATE 18

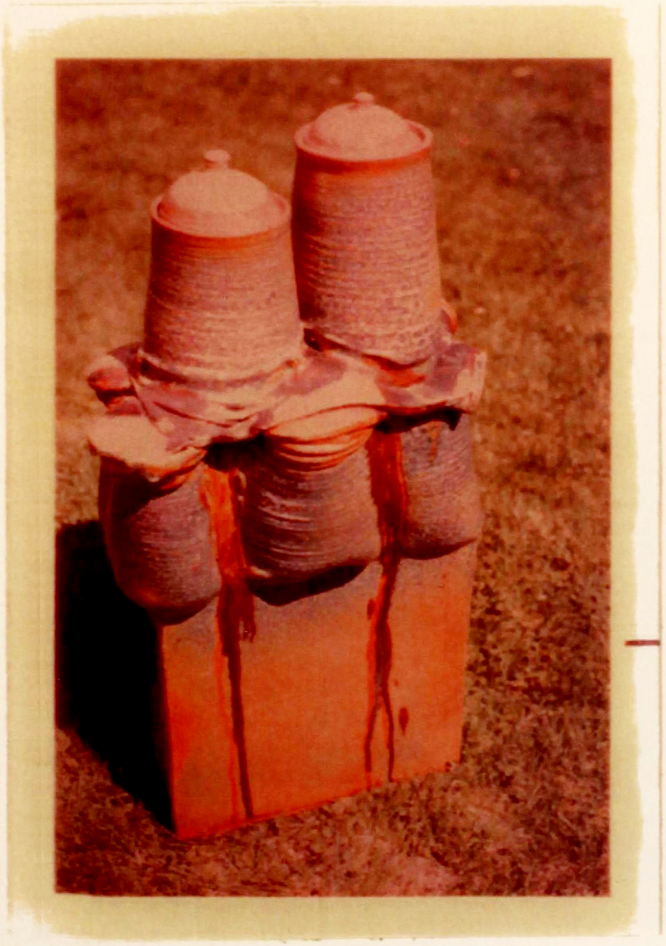

PLATE 19

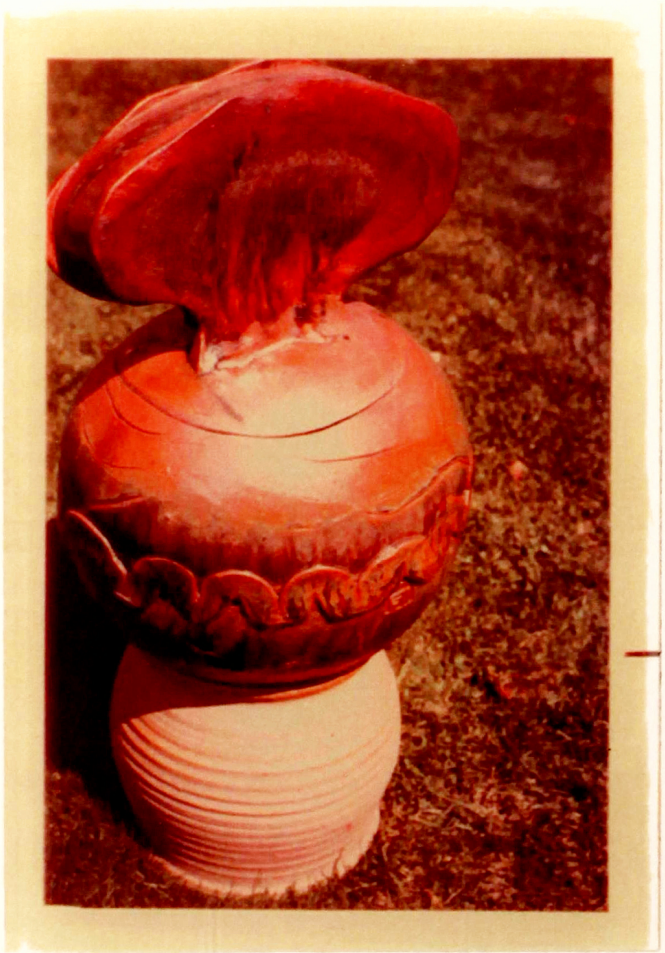

PLATE 20

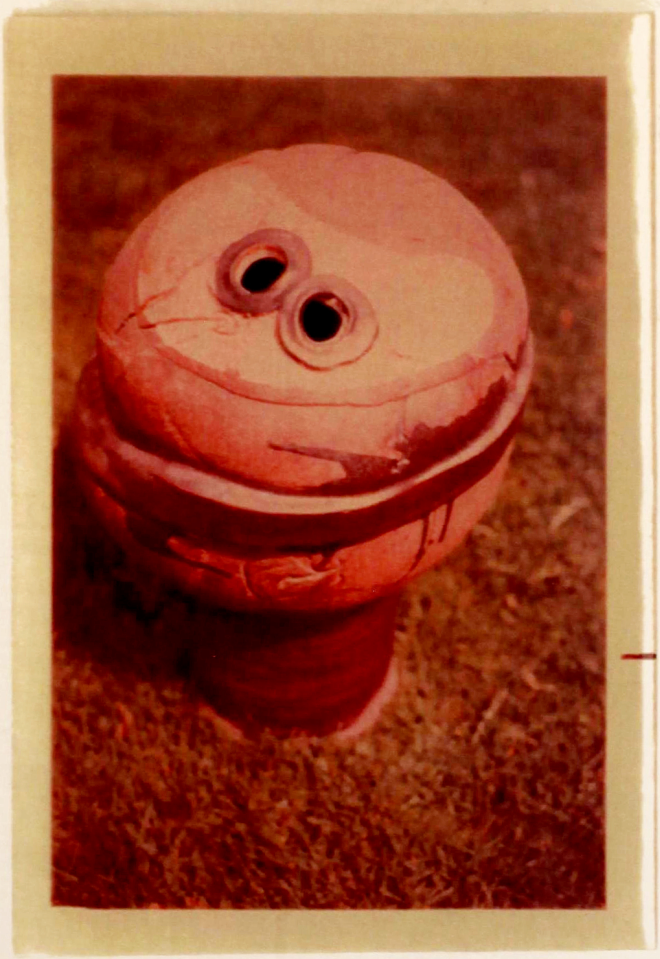

PLATE 21

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